DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 387 569 UD 030 634

AUTHOR	Vanistendael, Stefan
TITLE	Growth in the Muddle of Life. Resilience: Building on Other People's Strengths. ICCB Series.
INSTITUTION	International Catholic Child Bureau, Geneva (Switzerland).
PUB DATE	95
NOTE	47p.; This document has been translated into French, Spanish, and Dutch.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142)
EDRS PRICE	MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	Affective Behavior; *Child Development; Child Welfare; Cognitive Processes; *Cultural Differences; Foreign Countries; Life Events; Locus of Control; *Personality Traits; *Self Esteem; *Social Support Groups
IDENTIFIERS	*Resilience (Personality)

ABSTRACT

Resilience is the capacity of a person to do well facing difficult conditions in life. This implies capacities of resistance and of positive construction. Discovering the ways to contribute to resilience in children can begin with examination of resilient children. Research has suggested five interlinking bases for resilience: (1) social support networks based on the unconditional acceptance of the child as a person; (2) capacity to discover meaning in life, including spiritual life and religion; (3) skills and the feeling of having some control over what happens in life; (4) self-esteem; and (5) sense of humor. Resilience is built in a variety of areas in interaction and always develops in a concrete context of local circumstances and culture that must be taken into account in any efforts to build resilience. Whether the perspective is that of social policy or religious initiative, building resilience benefits the child and the child welfare worker. (Contains 17 references.) (SLD)

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GROWTH IN THE MUDDLE OF LIFE

Resilience : Building on people's strengths

ED 387 569

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Growth in the Muddle of Life

Resilience : Building on people's strengths

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ICCB
Geneva, 1995

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This publication has only be made possible thanks to the lessons learnt and help received from many other people. My warm and sincere thanks go to all of them, but I am only able to mention here the following people:

- the Council members of ICCB
- my staff colleagues in ICCB, and particularly the staff of the ICCB offices in New York and Geneva;
- Professor Friedrich Loesel from the University of Nürnberg-Erlangen, Germany; Dan Scheinfeld from the Erikson Institute in Chicago; Philipp Guinn from Philosophy for Children in Montclair, New Jersey; Bruno Dewachter from Caritas Flanders. They all gave extensive comments on the first draft of the present text.

As Professor Albert Jacquard, the French geneticist, once said in a conference, sooner or later we find out that all our best ideas come from somewhere else. The present text is no different. If on the contrary there are some poor ideas left, they are the responsibility of the author.

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Original in English. Translations in French, Spanish and Dutch.

Cover photo : CIRIC/J.C. Gadmer.

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Introduction

Resilience is the capacity of a person to do well facing difficult conditions in life. Resilience as a human reality is probably as old as mankind. After all, that is the only way in which the poor and the oppressed have survived. They have had to be resilient in one way or another, even if they had no concept for describing it.

But the scientific interest in resilience is recent. So in a way, scientists take an interest in the wisdom of the poor and oppressed. This is helpful, because it allows for more systematic insights in resilience and perhaps for further practical applications.

The present text reflects the professional position of its author: at an international level, somewhere between science and policy and direct action. The risk is that it will be irrelevant to all those areas, the hope is that it may give some inspiration. The reader who expects some revolutionary new insights or some ready-made solutions to problems will probably be disappointed. The reader who is looking for some inspiration, for some new ways of looking at well-known realities, may find the little time spent on reading this booklet worthwile.

My colleagues and I have felt the need for this sort of text on resilience for a while, but at the same time my understanding of resilience grows almost daily. So this text is really a working document, and to the extent that we gain enough new insights in the future, we may plan other publications on resilience later.

A practical warning: some of the insights in resilience go further than the child. So the reader should not be surprised to find a mixture of references to the child, to the person, to the individual, or even to the family and the community.

I hope you do not need to be very resilient to read this booklet. Good luck!

Resilience in a nutshell

Resilience is the capacity to do well when faced with difficult circumstances. That implies the capacities of both resistance and of positive construction.

There are many ways in which we can contribute to resilience. We may discover this by asking ourselves why some children have done so well when faced with adversity. The answer to that question may be somewhat different in each situation.

Based on research results and practical experience we propose five interlinking areas worth considering when we wish to foster resilience in children, but this list is not exclusive:

1. Social support networks and at the heart of them the unconditional acceptance of the child as a person.
2. Capacity to discover meaning in life. This is related to spiritual life and to religion.
3. Skills and the feeling of having some control over what happens in life.
4. Self esteem.
5. Sense of humour.

In these areas we may find some possible «building bricks» for resilience, but in each situation we have to check carefully in which area we can intervene positively, what «building bricks» we can use and how we can use them, or if there are any other areas and «building bricks» for resilience, which are worth discovering and using.

Resilience grows in an interaction between the child and its environment. As resilience is neither absolute nor stable over time, it needs to be fostered, always in a specific local cultural context. Resilience is no substitute for social policy, but it can inspire and at times refocus social policy.

1

What is Resilience ?

1.1. A shift in perspective

If a child has developed problems, because its father is an alcoholic, does that imply that all children of alcoholic fathers develop problems? Logically it does not since some children of alcoholic fathers do well. This simple asymmetry does not justify alcoholism of fathers, but it teaches us a lesson which is easily overlooked, because the attention of scientists and professionals in social work is often concentrated on the «problem child», so that we fail to learn from the healthy child.

But why are some children healthy *in spite of* the difficulties they have to live with? Why do some children at risk of certain problems *not* develop the problem they are exposed to? What can we learn from such «resilient» children for prevention or for intervention with other, less fortunate, children? Can we detect in so-called «problem children» some areas of possible strength on which they can build or rebuild their lives?

Such questions lead to a shift in perspective. Rather than looking at the weaknesses and deficits and how to compensate for them, we start looking at the strengths and how to use them. Rather than diagnosing problems and matching them with our ready-made solutions, we move to diagnosing needs **and** strengths of persons, families and communities, we try to mobilise those

strengths and see it that allows people, families and communities to work out some solutions. Or expressed in an image: rather than being totally absorbed by putting a plaster on a wound, we recognise that the real healing must come from the healthy part of the body surrounding the wound and we want to support the strength of the body and in doing so the process of healing.

The alcoholic father mentioned in the beginning of this chapter is just an example, but it could be another difficult situation a child has to live with, such as a conflict in the family or psychological trauma from war; unfortunately the list of difficult situations is endless...

The present booklet wishes to explain the above-mentioned shift in thinking to all people interested in child education and child welfare. Building on my experience as a staff person in an international child care organisation I will try to search for some answers to the questions raised above. Consequently, the present booklet is not a scientific document, it is not a policy outline, it is not a detailed programme description, nor a list of dos and don'ts, but it is some sort of synthesis between science, policy, action and life experience, which leaves any reader who wants to use it with some homework to do. I can not even claim that this is the only possible synthesis, but I hope it is sufficient to inspire field people, policy-makers and perhaps even scientists. In the end everyone has to find his or her own way of working with the «building bricks» offered in this booklet.

I hope that many people may recognise their own experience in it, or the experience of children they live with. In such cases this booklet would offer a possibility for reinterpreting or «re-reading» such experiences. Such reinterpretation may give new hope and new ideas for working and living with children.

1.2. Doing well in spite of difficulty: resilience

Resilience is an unusual word. In French and Spanish it is used in engineering only in order to describe the capacity of a material to recover its original form after having been deformed under pressure. In English it is also used to describe human qualities in analogy to the use in engineering. For the purpose of this booklet we use the word resilience in the wider sense, including human qualities, as in English.

We could enter into an endless debate about the correct definition of human resilience. But for the present practical purposes the following short definition is sufficient, even if it raises many scientific and political questions: *resilience is the capacity to do well in a socially acceptable way in spite of some form of stress or adversity which normally carries a high risk of a negative outcome*. This is a working definition only. It is based on elements given by two British resilience researchers, Michael Rutter from London and Albert Osborn from Bristol (See suggested reading p.42). We can simplify it even more in a real shortcut: resilience is the capacity to do well in a socially acceptable way when faced with adversity.

For action it is helpful to point out that resilience consists of two components, which make it a richer concept than coping:

- **resistance** against destruction, i.e. the capacity to protect one's own integrity under pressure; and

- beyond mere resistance, the capacity to **construct** a positive life in spite of difficult circumstances.

We can make the resilience concept more explicit by being a little more analytical. Some elements of personality in continuous interaction with some elements of the environment can develop this double capacity for resisting and for building. This capacity, called resilience, can be latent. But depending on one's life history such a capacity can turn into an active process of resisting breakdown and building up life against all sorts of odds. Such a process activates, so to say, the capacity we have called resilience. It is an activated potential. This process in itself therefore may even reinforce the capacity we have called resilience. The results of such a process show in positive development in spite of difficult life conditions.

Resilience may *show up* in a variety of ways. The German researcher Friedrich Loesel, for example, has pointed out the following possibilities (See suggested reading):

- Good outcomes despite high risk, for example when overcoming an accumulation of stressors and strains as in the case of a street child who has become a fine street educator;

- Sustaining competence under threat of which Anne Frank was perhaps

an example when she continued to develop well for over two years in very difficult circumstances (see box p.11) until she died in a concentration camp;

- Recovering from trauma and doing well afterwards; perhaps this is exemplified in the female artistic ice skating gold medalist at the 1994 Olympic Winter Games in Norway, Oksana Baiul. She was abandoned by her father when she was 2 and lost her mother when she was 13, but then she blossomed in her adoptive family.

From a very strict action point of view the really interesting part is not the definition of resilience but some idea of how we can build it up and stimulate it. For that reason this booklet will concentrate a lot on areas where we can look for «building bricks» which may help us construct resilience.

1.3. Resilience at any price ?

Some young people who have had a terribly deprived childhood may escape adversity and make a living by drug dealing and violent crime. They have found a way to survive, but can we call this doing well in spite of difficulty? Is this resilience? No. Resilience is not the law of the jungle, nor survival at any price. The way in which the potential of resilience is used is not indifferent.

It must be survival in socially acceptable ways, as Professor Osborn from Bristol, UK, pointed out in a speech on resilience made at an ICCB conference in New York in 1993. (See suggested reading). And he specified: «This despite the failure of society to meet the social and economic needs of all its members it nevertheless demands that those suffering the worst deprivations may only free themselves from such deprivations through socially legitimate means».

A social worker from a developing country once expressed a similar idea in an extreme form as follows: «In my country a poor man can only die if he uses legal means of survival. What he really needs to do for survival is illegal».

It is clear that this can lead to a heated debate on social policy, on what is «socially acceptable» and on who defines what is socially acceptable. I can not solve that issue here, be it only because, yet again, so much depends on local

Anne Frank, a resilient child

Examples often say more than elegant definitions and subtle theories. A famous example of a resilient child is Anne Frank. Anne Frank was a Jewish girl who lived in the Netherlands at the outbreak of the Second World War. Nazi Germany invaded her country and occupied her home town Amsterdam. The Germans organised a growing persecution of the Jews, so that Anne, her parents, her sister and four other people had to hide in a secret annex to an office building. This must be understood quite literally: they could never leave the annex, not even during the night. For food and other supplies they depended on the secret help of a few good friends outside. Anne Frank was 13 years old at the time. This confinement to a small space, with no escape, was added to the other wartime deprivations. Anne Frank lived for over 2 years under such extreme conditions and developed remarkably well, as is documented in her diary.

Towards the end of the war Anne and the others hiding were discovered by the secret police and transported to concentration camps. Only Anne's father survived the war.

The diary was discovered by accident. It was published and translated into dozens of languages after the war. The diary illustrates unintentionally a series of points documented later by resilience researchers, such as the importance of a trusting relation and the importance of an open, mature religious faith. We do not know how Anne would have developed later, if she had survived the war. But the fact is that she developed very well for about two years in conditions which were far from ideal.

Anne Frank was perhaps an exceptionally gifted girl. But there are also less gifted children who are resilient.

circumstances. But whatever our opinions are in such a debate, we all refer to some idea of what is desirable and acceptable. The point here is perhaps that we must be aware of such underlying assumptions when we talk about resilience, and that it can be useful to discuss them. This is or should be an area of ongoing dialogue between the variety of social rules in society, from peer pressure to the law on the one hand, and individual and collective conscience on the other hand.

Even if you do not like abstract ideological debate, such issues are highly relevant in social work. For example, how do we design a programme for youngsters who make more money in prostitution or in drug dealing than they can make in an ordinary job? But how can we design a project that offers a workable alternative? As we can probably not offer job alternatives where they can earn as much money, we may have to rebuild the youngster's self-esteem, give some values education, and much more. Resilience is not a clinical tool which is neutral in its functioning. Resilience in real life demands some sort of moral reference.

The damaged icon

The following meditation by an Orthodox monk Anthony Bloom is - unintentionally - a wonderful description of what resilience is all about: building on people's strengths, looking for the beauty in a person and enhancing that beauty. Perhaps this image can inspire even those who do not consider themselves to be particularly religious:

«Unless we look at a person and see the beauty there is in this person, we cannot contribute anything to him or her. One does not help a person by discerning what is wrong, what is ugly, what is distorted. Christ looked at everyone He met, at the prostitute, at the thief, and saw the beauty hidden there. Perhaps it was distorted ;erhaps damaged, but it was beauty none the less, and what He did was to call out this beauty... This is what we must learn to do with regard to others. But to do so we must first have a purity of heart, a purity of intention, an openness which is not always there... so that we can listen, can look, and can see the beauty which is hidden. Everyone of us is in the image of God, and everyone of us is like a damaged icon. But if we were given an icon damaged by time, damaged by circumstances, or desecrated by human hatred, we would treat it with reverence, with tenderness, with broken- heartedness. We would not pay attention primarily to the fact that it is damaged, but to the tragedy of its being damaged. We would concentrate on what is left of its beauty, and not of what is lost of its beauty. And this is what we must learn to do with regard to each person».

2

Some Building Bricks for Resilience

2.1. Towards a synthesis for action

Researchers have come up with many variables related to resilience, but all such variables do not have the same practical relevance. This booklet proposes a few areas where we may find some «building bricks» for resilience which will hopefully inspire fieldworkers in a variety of situations, countries and cultures. They are like areas for possible intervention. Each area may be related to a cluster of variables related to resilience as described in some research reports. This synthesis is based on the following six criteria:

- The selected area must be **simple** enough to be understood and to be used. There is no point in overpowering fieldworkers with explanations so complicated that they cannot be put into practice.

- The areas selected for possible action must be usable **across** many **cultures** and across several **stages of development** of the child. This excludes some research results which are very detailed and specific to certain cultures and age groups.

- The selected areas must be **practically relevant**. For that reason the selection is not based on research results only, but also on the echos received from fieldworkers in various countries and continents.

- The selected areas should **not be plainly contradicted** either by research or by field experience.

- Sometimes a series of variables mentioned separately in research can be **synthesized** in one area of possible intervention which is easier to remember. For example, a lot of variables turn around social skills and a variety of problem solving skills or even technical skills. This is easier to remember as one area called «skills».

- There must be a good reason to believe that in the selected area we can have some **real causal effect** on resilience, and that we are not talking about simple correlations of variables with no causal effect, or about a different way of describing resilience. Such a selection is based on a confrontation between research results and the experience of field people, be it only because it is difficult to prove causality in a strictly scientific way.

The following selection is certainly not perfect and must be provisional, open to improvement. The purpose is not to give a perfect tool, which functions like a mechanical device: push button A and effect B will happen. I do not believe that child development and social life operate in such a way. The purpose is to suggest to fieldworkers a different way of looking at the problems they are dealing with, to suggest a different direction in which to look for possible solutions, to suggest even a different way to look at the unsolvable problems. This implies that a lot of the details must be filled in by the fieldworker according to the specific situation he or she is dealing with. In the end the fieldworker may come up with his or her own synthesis of areas for possible intervention which are adapted to his or her needs. Resilience is certainly not a magic trick, but it may inspire new perspectives and new hope.

At present I believe the five following areas of possible intervention are worth being considered by fieldworkers who want to build up and stimulate resilience:

- Informal networks of support with at their very centre a relation of unconditional acceptance of the child by at least one significant adult. This acceptance is probably the base on which all the rest can be built.

- The discovery of meaning, sense and coherence. This is related to

spiritual life and to religion.

- Some social and problem solving skills and the sense of having some control over what happens in life.

- Some self esteem, some positive idea about oneself.

- Some sense of humour, or a climate in which humour can grow.

These factors are explained in greater detail below. For each area we can try to see:

- If and how it relates to the child, to the family, to the surrounding community; are there any resources available in any of those areas? For example, is there anybody around in the social network of the child who can give the child that feeling of being accepted and loved? Such a relation seems to exist in some street children projects between the woman who comes to cook and the children. Such a woman is not a professional psychologist. She might even be illiterate. Nevertheless she plays a vital role which goes way beyond the cooking.

- What we can suggest to stimulate growth in those areas:

  What can the child do, what can the family do, what can the community do? What can they do together? For example, can some form of artistic expression bolster self-esteem?

  This does not exclude, of course, the reference to specialised services, if they are really needed, and provided...such services are available or can be made available!

  We should never forget that we may gain some interesting insights by giving attention to children who face difficult conditions in life and who are at risk of developing problems, but who never develop such problems or who manage to overcome them. It may be worth trying to find a few such children. That is not always evident, as almost by definition such children will often **not** be in touch with the social worker or the specialised service.

Between scientific research and action

Action and scientific research are submitted to different constraints. It is important to understand this when we try to work out a synthesis for action concerning resilience. Below we indicate the extremes of such constraints. Real research and real action will normally be somewhere in between such extremes

ACTION	SCIENTIFIC METHOD
1. Non-scientific approaches can be important.	1. Scientific approach is necessary.
2. Less specialised.	2. More specialised.
3. Knowledge as such has no value.	3. Knowledge has value as such.
4. No need to know everything.	4. You never know enough.
5. Decisions are required without sufficient knowledge.	5. Insufficient knowledge requires more research.
6. First concern operational.	6. First concern intellectual.
7. Search for variables which can be influenced (policy variables).	7. Search for variables which can explain (scientific variables).
8. Strategic thinking first.	8. Explanation first.

2.2. Area one: Social networks and unconditional acceptance

For many people in research and in action unconditional acceptance of the child as a person comes out as the most important contribution to child resilience. This must not be interpreted in a mechanical way, such as: «If the child is unconditionally accepted as a person, then things must be all right». A child needs a lot more than that. But it seems to be a basis to build on. It also leaves us with a frightening question to which for the time being we have no answer: what do you do in the extreme case of a child that has lost any capacity to connect to another person?

Unconditional acceptance of the child as a person does not imply acceptance of the child's behaviour. It might well be the contrary, because unconditional acceptance of behaviour often is a sign of total indifference, the very opposite of acceptance.

Such unconditional acceptance is described in many different ways: really caring for the child, being fond of the child, the person the child can always come home to whatever happens.... After all we are talking here about real love for the child, in the full and strong sense of the word. Unfortunately the word love is often narrowed down to feelings or to sexual relations. But real love is the fascinating but challenging exercise of unconditional acceptance of a person, of welcoming a person in our life, something to try again day after day, something very different from all the conditional and functional relations modern society imposes. It is important to be aware of possible degradations of such relations, but we come back to that in a later chapter.

A former street child described his own experience as follows: «If I have come off the streets it is in the first place because one day I encountered somebody who really believed in me, a street educator».

There are extreme cases where the role of the «significant adult» was played by another child. In the case of Anne Frank, mentioned previously, her family was with her, she loved particularly her father, and later she developed a special relationship with a boy. But she wrote her diary to an imaginary friend, Kitty. This is a very unusual case of feeling accepted! In the beginning of her diary Anne Frank expresses this need for unconditional acceptance to this imaginary friend in very strong terms:

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«I hope I shall be able to trust you with everything, as I have never been able to do with anybody before, and I hope you will be a great support for me.»

Unconditional acceptance can normally occur more easily in informal relations of family and friends than in a professional relationship. That is one reason why informal social networks are so important. Furthermore such networks are often the first to give help in many areas of life when children are faced with problems. *This might imply that in a professional intervention great attention should be given to such informal relations.* It could imply that a social worker first tries to see how a child can be helped by and in its own informal surroundings, family, friends, community, before thinking of a direct intervention.

Friends, some close or remote family members, or sometimes teachers or persons in the surrounding community can play such a role of acceptance. For many reasons it is in the best interest of society that the informal networks function well.

If a family functions well, it will offer unconditional acceptance to its members. That is one of the reasons why families are so important but also bitterly criticised, because many people have the opposite experience of family-life.

For a variety of reasons many families do not offer such acceptance to their members. Probably many adults who behave «normally» have never experienced such acceptance. The resilience research does not say that the absence of such acceptance necessarily creates problems, but that such acceptance can make children much stronger in the face of adversity. Yet it seems that most people would be better off if they could experience such acceptance in their lives, if not in a family, then in some sort of profound friendship.

It follows that programmes and efforts which help families and a variety of friendships and informal relationships to function better, without aiming for perfection, can be extremely important and can prevent a lot of suffering.

2.3. Area two: the capacity to discover some order, sense and meaning in life.

«*Human beings do not live by bread alone*». That saying holds a lot of wisdom. We seem to need some sense and meaning in life, and that need is not just for adults or intellectuals. The word meaning is hard to define. Perhaps we can describe a sense of meaning as a profound understanding that there is something positive in life - even in spite of many bad experiences - to which we can relate and which can give us some coherence and orientation in life. The response to that need for meaning may take many forms. For example: having some small and achievable goals, the discovery of patterns and order and beauty, commitment to others, or various forms of religious faith.

This is typically an area of life which is very important and yet not totally accessible to strict scientific analysis. But it is also an area of life where we can be carried away by our imagination, or by clever manipulation. So it seems that a search for meaning needs to have some firm roots in reality. If it is too much the result of our imagination, it may well be swept aside sooner or later by life experience itself.

Experience shows that this sense of meaning can be helpful even in extreme circumstances. For example, Mother Theresa's care for the dying poor is not comprehensible from a purely utilitarian point of view. But it makes sense when we believe that in every life there is something precious worth caring for. Viktor Frankl, an Austrian psychotherapist, survived the atrocities of concentration camps. That experience opened his eyes to the importance of meaning, and it has inspired his psychotherapy based on the discovery of meaning in life, called logotherapy.

Some researchers have found a positive relation between resilience and religious faith, which is a particular form of the discovery of meaning. It is useful to give this relation more attention here. For example, a very fundamentalist approach to religion may create the appearances of resilience as long as it is not drastically challenged by life experience. In the face of such life experience it may collapse. Furthermore fundamentalist approaches to religion may perhaps protect one person, but a fundamentalist may be destructive to another person not sharing such fundamentalist beliefs. For example, many sects lead to exclusion and violence, and mix up our need for orientation with a lack of respect for conscience. This is in my view opposed to true religion.

Let me express here a very personal view: real religion, of whatever kind, should be a form of in-depth realism. Real religion is not an alienation or an escape, but on the contrary, it should allow us, in a given cultural context, to penetrate reality ever-deeper, even to some extent realities beyond our understanding, beyond our control and beyond our immediate physical experience. In the Judeo-Christian tradition we can find a source of resilience. For example, the opening chapters of the Bible express a basic belief, namely that creation is good, even if human beings have considerably messed it up. In general: if there is some basic goodness in creation, and if religion helps us to discover such goodness at ever-deeper levels, then religion may give us more strength and confidence, it may make us more constructive and resilient.

Perhaps we find an example of such a form of religion in Anne Frank's diary: a rather open and mature form of religion, not fundamentalist at all, which made her embrace reality at a greater depth, and which seems to have helped her a lot.

Sometimes religion can have a very direct positive influence on child resilience. An Asian man who had suffered from a very deprived childhood told me how his personal relation to God had helped him as a child. As far as I could see he had developed into a happy, mature and caring adult. Such stories are not uncommon. Yet they do not convince a really sceptical person, who will say that we do not know what the person would have been like without such a relationship to God.

We can stimulate the discovery of meaning in many different ways, taking into account the local culture and the development of the child. The child can discover patterns in games. It can be very helpful if the child can experience beauty and nature. It can be helpful to stimulate the child's own artistic expression of whatever sort, without always expecting esthetic masterpieces. Sometimes the discovery of a team spirit in sports such as soccer will be useful. The care for a flower, for a garden, for animals, the care for other persons can provide a sense of meaning. Philosophy for children (see box p.23) is a fascinating approach for reinforcing children's cognitive capacity, for clarifying values. Although this approach has much value on its own, it can certainly be helpful in the discovery of meaning, and contribute to child resilience in several other ways. Finally some children will discover the treasures of a relationship to God, based on both their own experience and the word and example of adults with religious faith.

2.4. Area three: a variety of skills

This area encompasses the learning of all sorts of social skills and problem solving skills, as well as some useful technical skills. If I have a skill that matches the situation I am in, a skill that can help me to solve a problem I am confronted with, then such a skill can contribute to my resilience. The list of such skills is almost endless. For example: how can I relate to people, how can I control my impulsive reactions, how can I ask for help or clarification, how do I think through a problem, how can I use of the old wisdom «think before you act», how can I keep calm when I feel insulted...and we can go all the way to learning professional skills: carpentry and office work, truck driving and carrying messages, being a good street educator or a doctor or a lawyer, etcetera.

The development of such skills is both practically very important and bound to local context and culture. For example, if I learn a professional skill, what are the prospects of getting a job with it? This has to be seen in the local context, which can be more-or-less wide-ranging depending on mobility. Perhaps there is no urgent need for carpenters in the town where I live now, but there is such a need in another town. Other examples: Do I live in a culture where you express yourself very openly and directly? Or on the contrary, do I live in a culture where such a way of speaking is considered to be insulting? Or do I need to be able to relate to two such different cultures? How is time considered in the cultures I need to relate to? Are careful time-planning and being on time considered to be a sign of respect for others? Or is having time for an unexpected visitor seen as a necessary sign of respect for others?

But it is not enough to have such skills. The child must be able and willing to use them. The child or young person must feel he or she can make a difference, however small it may be. The child should feel that the «locus of control» is in himself or herself. For example: a former street child got his first job in a factory, but due to an administrative error he did not receive his paycheck when all other workers got theirs. The first impulsive reaction of the young man was violent, but fortunately he controlled his impulses thanks to what he had learnt in the project he had been involved in. So he was able to sort the problem out with the administration and receive his paycheck. If he had followed his impulses he might have been fired.

Philosophy for children (see box p.23) may also contribute to that, when a child discovers it can form ideas and tackle different questions, or when it

Philosophy for children

Philosophy for children has a solid academic and practical foundation, but is not at all elitist. On the contrary, much of its experience is with disadvantaged children. There is an active interest in Philosophy for children in the USA and in other countries, such as Australia, Belgium, Brasil, Bulgaria, Canada, Mexico, the Philippines, Spain, Taiwan and Zimbabwe.

In philosophy for children a group of children form a «community of inquiry». Together they read a story or they listen to a story, they raise questions triggered off by that story and they discuss a selection of such questions, under the guidance of an adult trained in philosophy for children. This is done on the basis of specially designed stories in a carefully guided process, which helps to build the children's thinking skills in different areas, such as logical thinking, ethical thinking and language. The process also stimulates attitudes of mutual respect and tolerance.

It is **doing** basic philosophy rather than studying philosophical systems.

The positive effects on children, including deprived children can be impressive. For example: less school drop-out, catching up with their level in school if they are behind, better resistance to offers of drugs. In brief: Philosophy for children helps children «to get their act together», even in difficult circumstances, by increasing their cognitive capacities.

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helps to think a little before speaking out, or when it helps to think through problems.

The attractive side of skills is that a lot of them can be learnt, be it in ordinary life, or by some form of training. So it is important that children have such learning opportunities at home, in school or with friends. That implies, among other things:

- that children have to live up to some standards and that they are given the means for doing so, and get enough encouragement;
- that children have the possibility to participate in many activities at a level of responsibility they can cope with.

There is a temptation to see skills training as a solution to many problems. In that view any problem can be solved, provided we give the appropriate training. But human beings are not computers that need some programming or reprogramming. As one educator of street boys pointed out: skills training can be pretty useless if there is not first unconditional acceptance of the child and if the child can not make any sense out of his or her life, two areas mentioned in previous chapters. It seems that in these first two areas we can build some solid foundations on which to build the rest, including skills training. That process should not be seen too analytically. Sometimes, particularly in formal training, we can follow a more or less orderly sequence of steps, but in real life a lot of things go together.

For example, a particularly caring teacher may provide a stable relation for the child as well as skills training, and in the process life may make some sense to a child.

It is perhaps in this area of skills training that we will most readily find all sorts of educational materials and courses. But even so, there are probably no miracle courses, and we must see in each situation, sometimes with each child, what is really suitable.

2.5. Area four: self-esteem

Self-esteem is often mentioned in research and by fieldworkers in relation to resilience. It is related to the areas mentioned already. Unconditional acceptance of the person (not any behaviour) will stimulate self-esteem. So

will the discovery of meaning: if my life makes some sense, then it can not be all that bad. And the mastery of skills normally stimulates self-esteem, provided the standards are neither too high nor too low. Yet it is good to mention self-esteem separately, because self-esteem can be very important in its own right and there is a lot of simple everyday behaviour that can stimulate or destroy it. For example, harsh discipline, much negative criticism, unattainable standards and sharp irony may be fairly common, but they can be very destructive for self-esteem. Some well-founded encouragement, constructive criticism, standards without perfectionism may also be fairly common, but they will tend to bolster self-esteem.

Let us give three examples.

- First, a person working with sexually exploited children set out to find out why some of the children at risk of such exploitation did **not** fall into the trap. It turned out that the children simply had a strong disgust of the reality of sexual exploitation. This implies that these children had some self-esteem. Knowing that, we can then try to find ways of bolstering such self-esteem as a type of prevention. But again, what applies here, may work out quite differently in another situation.

- Second, professor Matthew Lipman from Montclair, New Jersey, the founder of «Philosophy for Children», an exciting educational approach (see box 5), explains in a BBC television film how teaching very poor children to think may boost their self-esteem. A really poor child often has nothing of its own. Even its bed or toy may suddenly be taken away. But when such a child creates its own thoughts, it has something of its own to be proud of, something nobody can take away.

- Third, a street educator explained how he dealt with street children stealing. He did not simply criticise them for theft. First he let the child explain how he did it. Often the theft was very ingenious! Only then the street educator gradually tried to reorientate such cleverness to more constructive goals in life. So he tried to save both the self-esteem and the ingenuity of the child, framing it in a socially acceptable way. This illustrates several issues:

a) not accepting the child's behaviour, but accepting the child as a person;

b) bringing out some positive qualities which many people may not notice

because they are in a sense hidden behind unacceptable behaviour;

c) respecting and bolstering the child's self-esteem in that whole process.

The last example also illustrates how self-esteem can be intimately related to the other areas we have talked about in previous chapters.

2.6. Area five: humour

Humour is rarely mentioned in resilience research, but readily recognised as very important by fieldworkers of various cultures and even by some specialists in education.

Humour can be much more than just fun. A friend who is always very happy and joyful but who has suffered immensely in his life pointed out that at the bottom of most humour is some suffering. Humour often means that we recognise the imperfection, the suffering, but we integrate it positively in life, with a smile. Perhaps we can not get rid of the suffering, *but we are not beaten by it either*. All this implies that real humour can be subtler than a simple escape mechanism: escape is running away from the unpleasant reality, but humour integrates such reality into life and transforms it into something more bearable and more positive. This can give enormous strength and the link with resilience can be very direct. So humour can take many forms from simple fun to the smile we keep in the face of adversity. And somebody who manages the difficult virtue of laughing at himself or herself gains in interior freedom and strength.

Humour does not travel well, it is very culturally specific. French humour is very different from British humour, but both can be most enjoyable, provided we really enter into the corresponding culture. I have never heard of a culture without any form of humour and humour seems to be present in children from a very early age. It starts with simple smiling and laughter, and gradually develops with growing age and experience into what is sometimes a very subtle form of humour.

We can identify some elements of humour, such as: tenderness towards imperfection, mature acceptance of failure, shift in perspective, paradox,

Resilience factors: a synthesis of scientific research results

Professor Loesel from Nürnberg - Erlangen, Germany, gives the following 10 personal and social resources contributing to resilience, on the basis of a review of scientific research results (see suggested reading). This selection is somewhat different from the synthesis presented in this booklet, because it is based on different criteria. Yet there is no fundamental contradiction between the two approaches.

1. Stable emotional relationships with at least one parent or other reference person.
2. Social support from inside and outside the family.
3. An emotionally positive, open, guiding, and norm-oriented educational climate.
4. Social models that encourage constructive coping.
5. Balance of social responsibilities and achievement demands.
6. Cognitive competencies.
7. Temperament characteristics that favour effective coping.
8. Experiences of self-efficacy, corresponding self- confidence and positive self-concept.
9. Actively trying to cope with stressors.
10. The experience of sense, structure and meaning in one's own development.

confidence even when things go wrong, play, creativity, fantasy... and there may be more. Such elements are illustrated in the simple joke of the bald man with a beard who claimed that he managed now to grow his hair upside down.

We cannot train people to be humorous, but we might be able to create a climate in a project, in a family or even in school where humour can spring up and blossom. We should look for games and other activities which can stimulate the elements of humour mentioned previously.

Even humour is related to the other areas mentioned in the previous chapters. For example, Frode Soebstad, an expert on humour development in children from the Queen Maud College of Early Childhood Education in Trondheim, Norway, told me how a climate of confidence (see area one mentioned above) is important for the proper development of humour. Without such a climate there may still be humour, but it can become very aggressive. Mr Soebstad has even advised the Norwegian authorities on humour in kindergarten, as a co-author of a report on kindergarten for the ministry of children and the family.

The following example of how humour can operate comes from a religious sister active with domestic child workers in India. She explained how humour helped the children to keep some self-esteem. As the domestic workers are under enormous pressure to reject their origins and to replace their own values by some materialistic middle-class values, they protect themselves by ridiculing such middle-class values. This is an extreme case, because it comes close to a dangerous perversion of humour: irony, ridicule and cynicism...which are «killers»! Flippancy and ridicule can be very damaging, not just for the person undergoing it, but in the end also for the person using it: such a person gets shielded from reality and becomes isolated.

It is not a coincidence that oppressed populations often develop a delightful sense of humour which laughs with the oppressor. This was the case under dictators, both right wing and left wing, as in the history of some Latin American or East European countries. This does not justify the oppressor, but it shows how humour can be a means of integrating some most unpleasant realities in life, without being beaten by them. If at some stage the unpleasant reality as such can be changed, that is even better.

Christians may remember that Christ said in the beatitudes according to the text of St Luke's Gospel: «Blessed are you who weep now; you will laugh»

(Luke 6, 21 b). This captures very well the heart of mature humour. Unfortunately many Christians seem to remember only the version of Mathew's Gospel : «You will be consoled». Christians may recognise in humour a direct link with the dynamics of the cross and resurrection of Christ, an event which beyond its historical reality expresses a profound structure of everyone's life which is constantly in God's hands : wounds, something bad is transformed into something good, into new and unexpected life. It remains a mystery as to why there has been such a strong undercurrent of suspicion towards laughter and humour in the Christian tradition and churches, not the least in St Benedict's rule for monks. Fortunately humour itself, so to say, seems to be resilient, and many monks are very joyful people who laugh heartily and do not follow their master's rule in this detail.

We can understand how some people are afraid that a superficial understanding of humour may lead to the sort of shallow fun which blocks the access to any depth in life. That reminds us of Neil Postman's famous phrase «We amuse ourselves to death». But such abuse should not divert us from the treasures of humour, which are as God smiling to us through His tears. After all, humour is too serious a matter to be neglected in the life of children!

Resilience in questions

Note: the word child can be replaced by family or community in many of the following questions.

- Does the child have some friends or family members or any other person to whom he or she relates very well?
  If so, how can that person be helpful? If not, can we find a person like that in the child's normal environment who can give the child some stability and warmth and acceptance?

- How does the child make sense out of its life?
  Does the child have any hobbies? Does the child have any projects in life, for later when adult, or for the immediate future? Does the child enjoy music or any other form of the arts, as entertainment, or as an active hobby? If so, what does the child get out of it?
  Does the child have a religious faith? If so, how does this help or not help the child? Does the child like helping others?

- What is the child really good at doing? Can it be improved? Can it be helpful? Are there certain new things the child should learn?

- What positive qualities can we find in the child? Is the child aware of such qualities? How can they be stimulated? How can they help the child or others? Does the child have any skills which are used poorly and come out in undesirable behaviour? Can such skills be used more positively?

- Are there any things which are really good fun for the child? What does the child enjoy most? What does the child laugh at? Is the child very ironical, or does the child have a milder form of humour? What games can we play with a child that imply shifts in perspective (a very simple one for infants and toddlers, for example, might be peep-bo).

- What does the child perceive as a problem? How does that relate to what adults find is a problem? How does the child work out his or her problem? Can we build on that? Would an intervention hamper the child's problem solving skills?

- Are there children around facing similar difficulties but with no apparent problems? What can we learn from them? Can this be used with the children who do not do so well?

- Is the child a problem-case for me? Or is it still a person? How well do I really know the child? Do I really know all the potential of the child?

- If I am in an «expert» role, on what is my expertise based? Does this apply in the situation I am dealing with? How? What can I learn from the children and adults I am dealing with?

- Is the child a problem-case for me? Or is it still a person? How well do I really know the child? Do I really know all the potential of the child?

- If I am in an «expert» role, on what is my expertise based? Does this apply in the situation I am dealing with? How? What can I learn from the children and adults I am dealing with?

3

Resilience in a broader Perspective

3.1. A few specifications about resilience

In the previous sections we have presented different areas in which we can find some «building bricks» for resilience. Now we must give some specifications and warnings about resilience in operation.

In Christian mythology the devil is a fallen angel. This does not express any physical reality, but a profound truth about life experience. It also applies to resilience. All the areas mentioned before and related to resilience, carry a risk of degeneration. For example:

- child abuse often happens with an adult who is close to the child;
- religion which does not respect human conscience can degenerate into sects and even violence;
- social skills can be abused for manipulating others;
- self-esteem can tilt to arrogance;
- humour can lapse into irony and sarcasm.

Recognising such risks can make us realistic and prudent, but it should not prevent us from using «building bricks» for resilience in those different areas.

Beyond the areas mentioned you may discover some other areas and «building bricks» for resilience. For example, several people insist on the

need for some good role models in the everyday life of the child, people from whom a child can learn without a formal learning situation. Some street educators in big cities mention the importance of enriching the street children's life with some experience of nature, woods, trees, flowers, animals. And there may be many more possibilities.

Resilience is built up in a variety of such areas in interaction between people and environment. Hence it is neither something purely pumped in from the environment, nor something purely inborn. The separation between inborn qualities and influence from the environment is very artificial, as both can only grow together and need each other.

Given this ongoing process between person and environment, it can easily be understood that resilience is never absolute nor perfectly stable. Children are never absolutely resilient, invulnerable. Even the strongest child will have ups and downs and will break down under too much pressure. Hence we must cultivate resilience and foster it in a specific cultural context. This can be an inspiration for education, social policy and social work. A resilience approach may lead to some specific accents in social policy, but it can never be a substitute for social policy.

It is useful to note in this context that vulnerability has also its positive sides: beyond admiration, the most profound human relations between two persons are often based on mutual recognition of each other's vulnerability, on mutual respect of such vulnerability and on the mutual knowledge of that respect. And how could a child feel profoundly accepted if it did not have any vulnerability?

Finally resilience always develops in a concrete context of local circumstances and culture. This must be taken into account. Failing to do so may make things even worse. But this is very difficult and even tricky, because with the best of intentions it is very hard not to see another culture, a new situation through the eyes of our own culture and what is familiar to us by education, experience and training. It may happen, and more often than we think, that even a person who is fully aware of the importance of «intercultural difference» and who has studied such differences, fails to recognise them in practice. We can only try to do our best to be aware of our cultural roots, without which we are not human beings, but which also colour our perception of life, be it in another country, in another continent or in an unfamiliar neighbourhood.

3.2. Resilience and Social Policy

Some people fear that a focus on resilience may undermine child welfare policy. But this is a misconception, because even resilience has to be fostered, and we will always need some special services and protection for children at great risk. At most a resilience approach may suggest other accents or another way of working in child welfare and in education.

But in order to see more clearly where child resilience is situated in child welfare policy, we need to have a look at a broader picture of society.

A social worker in Brooklyn observed a few years ago in a private conversation, that Western society seems to substitute the ordinary functioning of society by an increasing number of specialised programmes and services. The problem is not just that families, schools and communities have problems, because after all, they have always had problems. But those ordinary primary networks, the social tissues surrounding children seem to find it increasingly difficult to find solutions to problems or to live with unsolvable problems. We rely increasingly on all sorts of specialised services and projects, not only for the improvement of the quality of life, but also because the ordinary social tissue seems to disintegrate and seems unable to cope with ordinary life. Can we try to improve the functioning of the ordinary social tissue in society?

This is all the more urgent because there is a tendency to export similar models of society to so-called developing countries. I remember some Zambian social workers explaining - years before any AIDS crisis - how they had to create something unheard of in their society, adoption services, because the ordinary informal solidarity networks had broken down as a side effect of so-called development.

Even if some people may disagree with the above impressions, the question remains: what can we do to improve the functioning of the ordinary social tissue, of families, of schools, of communities? What can we do so that they find it easier to solve their problems, or if need be, to live with their problems?

This can be done mainly in two ways:

- One: reinforcing from within the functioning itself of such social networks as schools, families and communities; the child resilience approach can be helpful here;

- Two: shaping a framework in society which facilitates the functioning of such social networks. The latter includes measures in a wide variety of areas: legislation, housing policy, economic policy...

The two approaches are **not** mutually exclusive, quite the contrary, although certain ideologies across the political spectrum may want to see the two approaches in conflict. I hope the day will come when such ideologies belong to the past.

Both approaches are needed. In the present booklet I concentrate on the first approach in the perspective of resilience, mainly from the point of view of the child. This limitation in the presentation does not reflect any political priority, but it is simply due to the nature of the subject and to the limits of my experience.

3.3. Resillience and resurrection: a Christian view

The following is an explicitly Christian view on resilience. There are other religious or transcendental or even Christian views possible, but in the framework of this publication I limit myself to this one, because it seems very close to the heart of both resilience and the Christian faith, and because in ICCB we share a Christian view on our work.

The search for paradise or for a perfect world still is a strong orientation, particularly in Western society, be it often unconsciously. It influences a wide variety of areas from advertising to entertainment, from politics to social work and also private lives. The message from the Bible's book of Genesis that paradise is lost and unaccessible on earth is not really accepted, not even by people who read the Bible. Yet, I believe that the early chapters of Genesis describe some fundamental structures of life and of human experience, be it in a special literary form. And it is the consistent experience of generations that paradise on earth is an elusive ideal.

The earthly paradise is at its best an illusion giving some short term comfort, at its worst a cruel alienation possibly leading to the illusionary shortcut to paradise by drugs or even by violence. Many atrocities have been committed on behalf of some promise of earthly paradise and on behalf of the radical solutions to all our problems, by dictators both from left and from right wing.

The cruelty of the alienation is that in the light of an ideal of paradise all our wounds and all our shortcomings are a pure loss and waste, which can only increase as the years go by.

Christ did not come to help us find paradise on earth. Yet He is often interpreted in that sense. But Christ's message is different. Christ showed us that there is no need to search for such a return to how life was before it was broken. Christ liberated us from that profound alienation by pointing to another possibility: the brokenness of life, our wounds can be transformed in new and unexpected life. This can happen already here and now. And Christ showed - so Christians believe - that this process will continue beyond space and time, beyond death, beyond our natural limits. So Christ showed that in the end, whatever happens, life is stronger than death, wounds can turn into new life, hope is in a very realistic way part of life. This does not justify nor glorify suffering, but it may help alleviate the despair of wounds which seem to be a total waste.

This is very powerfully demonstrated in the image of Thomas meeting Christ after resurrection: all the wounds of Christ are still there, but they are turned into new and unexpected life.

The fulfillment shown so powerfully by Christ shimmers already in our own life experience. It is as if there are traces in our life which point in the direction of what Christ showed in its fullness. But I admit that traces are no hard evidence.

Resilience is precisely one of such traces. It is a natural experience of many people, a natural experience of life's tenacity, of positive growth when much is lost. In that sense resilience is perhaps the most natural foreshadowing of Christ's message of cross and resurrection. Christ has carried that experience beyond our natural limits, beyond death.

In that sense, I feel that in the Christian view of the world there is no radical difference between life before death and life after death. Both are part of an ongoing process of creation and of gradual transformation of evil into good, but that process takes a different form after death. The Christian commitment is to **all** life, before and after death, with no opposition between the two.

The latter is a difficult balance as the history of Christian spirituality shows. There is always a temptation to give priority to one over the other: life

before death is seen as less or more important than life after death. Yet the Christian is invited to go beyond that false opposition. In a Christian view there is no contradiction between total commitment to life here and now, and total hope for the future. Both are somehow two sides of the same coin of life.

3.4. How can the resilience approach inspire us?

The resilience approach can **inspire** us, can refocus our attention, but we have to work out ourselves the details of what we want to do and can do with resilience. Resilience is not a magic box, nor a hat with tricks, nor a cooking book with recipes, nor a technique. It is far removed from any approach of «social engineering». Resilience is more an inspiration for work and for life, a frame which allows us to re-read our own experience and to learn from it. In what follows we will see how resilience can inspire us or refocus our attention in at least ten different ways.

- *First*, the resilience approach may give us some **realistic hope**, because without denying the problems there are, it focuses our attention on the strengths on which to build. Real hope is no escape from reality, but it opens our eyes to the positive yet hidden potential. This is true in the life of an individual, but also in the life of families, communities and populations.

  Resilience helps us to move away
  - from despair, which is realism without hope,
  - from cynicism which fails to see the positive sides of reality and
  - from unrealistic illusions.

  Despair and cynicism in particular often present themselves as «realism», but in fact they are both short sighted and unrealistic, because they only offer a partial and truncated view of reality.

  A resilience approach tends to see life as a process with many possible outcomes and not as a deterministic mechanism. This adds to the perspective of «realistic hope». For example, although there is no doubt about the great importance of the first few years of the development of a child, research and experience with resilience show that many children can also make remarkable recoveries from early social deprivation, particularly in late adolescence and early adulthood, provided they are given a real chance.

- *Second*, in the design, planning, implementation and evaluation of interventions and projects, we could consider **the areas in which we may be able to build resilience**. The five areas mentioned in this booklet can help you to get started, but they are by no means a law carved in stone. In which areas can we build resilience? Are they taken into account? This is developed in the earlier parts of this booklet. And everyone of us will have to develop it in a variety of situations in life.

- *Third*, resilience reminds us of the importance of **love** in the full sense of the word. Children need to be loved, and so do adults. It sounds like old wisdom rediscovered. By love we mean: unconditional acceptance of the person, way beyond mere admiration, and in spite of odd behaviour and characteristics we may disagree with. Put simply: love is a profound and stable welcome of another person in life. This is a much richer reality than the narrow focus on feelings and on sex to which love has often been reduced in Western society. This richer reality of love also includes intelligence and will, patience and endurance, empathy and real interest in others, capacity to forgive and to receive forgiveness, a sense of distance and of intimacy, a capacity to live with failure and imperfection... It may be challenging, but it is not elitist, and it is certainly more realistic and achievable than identifying love with an ongoing feeling of butterflies in your stomach. Resilience reminds us strongly of the importance of this sort of full-blooded love.

- *Fourth*, the resilience approach suggests looking carefully at the potential of **informal networks**: family, friends, community... Are they present in one way or another? Can they be helpful? What solutions would they offer? Perhaps their solutions do not match ours, but can they be helpful anyway? How can we activate some informal relations if they are lacking? How can we develop and articulate a collaboration between a professional intervention and informal volunteer work, without the professionals just taking over? How can a professional intervention be useful for restoring and/or stimulating the ordinary functioning of informal social networks in everyday life?

- *Fifth*, the resilience approach suggests looking not only at problem cases but **learning** from those who have no apparent problems in spite of having had similar difficulties. If I have to deal with a child who is disturbed because his/her father is an alcoholic, do I know a child who is doing well although his/her father is an alcoholic? What can I learn from the latter child?

- *Sixth*, the resilience approach suggests **never reducing a person** to his or her problem, to a «case». How can I detect whatever potential there is in a child? How can that potential grow? How can it be useful in working out a solution? This can be very difficult, precisely to the extent that we deal with some «hidden» potential. Furthermore, it is difficult to see a potential in the widest sense, because it is very hard to look beyond the horizon of what we are familiar with in our culture.

- *Seventh*, the resilience approach suggests it is worthwile learning from the **solutions people work out for themselves** sometimes before any professional intervention. Such solutions may not be in agreement with majority opinions in society, but they often follow a strategy rather well suited to the circumstances. It is useful to consider such solutions carefully and to check how we can build on them before trying to change things. For example, a street worker in India tried to find out not only what the problems of the street children in his community were but also what solutions they had found, before thinking about any sort of intervention.

- *Eighth*, underlying the previous points is a specific perspective on **responsibility**, which moves away from some traditional ideologies across the political spectrum. In the light of resilience it seems that responsibilities somehow are shared by many people and groups in society. We cannot hold either society or the individual totally responsible for what happens in life. Our life is a process in which we can play a role, be it at times a limited one. Even children are not mere objects of education or intervention. They have from an early age some responsiblity, adapted to the stage of their development. Since resilience develops in interaction between the individual and the surrounding environment we have a responsibility towards ourselves and towards others. This is normally a shared responsibility. Nobody needs to carry all the burdens of the world, but we are all invited to carry with others at least some of them.

- *Ninth*, a resilience approach reminds us **that limits and constraints are inherent in life**. Part of intelligence and of the art of life is precisely how we can make the best out of such a condition. We can even state this in a paradox: we can only live life to the fullest to the extent that we can accept some limits and make some choices. In that sense the

widespread ideal of the development of the full potential of the child is an internal contradiction.

The language development of the child illustrates this. In the beginning a child can make all sorts of sounds, the potential for all human languages. It is only by selecting and by leaving out a lot of potential language developments that the child can learn a mother tongue and perhaps a couple of other languages. If the child had to stick to its full language potential, the child would actually never learn a language and continue to produce inarticulate sounds.

This aspect of resilience goes against a few modern tendencies, such as the secret desire for perfection and paradise.

Such desire for perfection can be seen in much publicity, in many political ideals. At best it leads to disappointment, at worst to escapism and drugs. The resilience approach paradoxically opens the door to some real improvements, because it accepts some limits.

- *Tenth*, resilience suggests a rethinking of our definition of **health**. In line with the previous ideas the resilience approach suggests that health is not some sort of ideal state with no problems and no flaws. Resilience suggests thinking of health as the *capacity to solve problems or to find constructive ways of living with unsolvable problems*. Such capacities, like resilience, grow in an interaction between a person and the environment. In that sense health is a gradated concept. This is illustrated in the concept of disability. For example, a child with paralysed legs will be able to move more easily with a wheelchair than without one, and with a wheelchair such a child will be more mobile if there are access ramps to buildings.

These are a few ways in which the resilience approach may inspire us, sometimes even beyond the strict building of resilience. You will probably find some other ways.

Resilience in ICCB

The resilience theme was introduced into ICCB by its R&D (Research and Development) section, which has to look for new and promising ideas from science and action and contribute to their development, particularly for practical purposes. Hence, much R&D work in ICCB starts when the scientific research has ended. The starting point with resilience in ICCB literally was the reading of Emmy Werner's article on resilience in Scientific American of April 1989 (See suggested reading). From there the theme was developed in ever widening circles by consulting more materials, more experts, more practicioners, by developing an understanding of resilience which moves back and forth between research and action, by gradually introducing a resilience approach or inspiration in a variety of ICCB activities and by proposing the theme to groups and organisations outside ICCB. This approach has, for example, inspired ICCB's refugee programme.

The ICCB General Assembly heard an explanation of resilience by Professor Loesel (University of Nürnberg-Erlangen, Germany) and discussed the theme before accepting it as a working theme for ICCB on 26 November 1992.

The ICCB office in New York organised an institute on child resilience and the family in New York in the autumn of 1993. As a follow-up to this institute, at the time of the drafting of the present text, the ICCB office in New York is studying the possibility of some pilot projects on child resilience in the USA. The issue of Children Worlwide in the suggested readings contains the major contributions to this New York institute.

ICCB has presented a synthesis on resilience on a variety of occasions at seminars and conferences organised by ICCB or by other groups both in Europe and in other continents. Such presentations have often been occasions for dialogue with fieldworkers which have considerably enriched ICCB's insights into resilience.

The resilience approach gives some coherence to the great diversity of interests and activities of ICCB, in line with ICCB's mission statement. And there is work for years to come... This is typically long-term work, often geared to prevention, and complimentary to the more spectacular emergency interventions of other agencies. Such long-term work is needed. How else can we prevent even more emergencies?

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY : SUGGESTED READING

This bibliography contains a few texts relating to resilience, in several languages. Some of the texts are scientific, some are not. Some of them deal with resilience in general, some with a specific aspect. Some of them may not even mention resilience, although they clearly relate to it. They all have one point in common: they all offer an inroad into resilience or one of the aspects of resilience. Most texts have their own bibliography. So they offer a possibility of getting more in the subject, from different viewpoints and in different languages. There is no claim whatsoever of presenting here an even remotely complete bibliography.

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REQUEST FOR FEEDBACK

If you wish to share your ideas, your discoveries or your experiences concerning the resilience approach, please write to us. Tell us, what has been helpful? What not? How do things concretely work? Can you give us some concrete examples of resilience, of how you have been able to detect or to build or to mobilise resilience?

Your insights and experience are precious, not only for us, but also for the many people we reach out to, and last but not least for the children.

Many thanks in advance for whatever time you can give to share your precious experience in this field with others.

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ICCB'S Mission

The ICCB, founded in 1948, serves the holistic growth of all children, in a Christian perspective. It gives particular attention to the most deprived children, especially disabled children, child victims of the street, drugs, war and the sex trade.

The ICCB constitutes a network of consultation for research and action. According to the needs of children and drawing upon their capacities, the ICCB develops short, medium and long range projects. In all its actions, the ICCB takes care to promote spiritual growth, intercultural awareness and the rights of the child. It always takes the child's family environment into consideration.

Serving all children in a holistic perspective

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I. DOCUMENT IDENTIFICATION:

Title: Growth in the Middle of Life. Resilience: Building on Peoples' Strengths.

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Corporate Source: International Catholic Child Bureau, Inc.

Publication Date: 1995

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